

Arabia's First Garrison

by

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In a masterly article published two decades ago Mrs. Claire Préaux discussed Trajan's annexation of the Nabataean kingdom and its transformation into the Roman province of *Arabia*.¹ Two important papyri had become available then, letters written by a soldier stationed in the new province just after the conquest. In one of these letters, dated March 26, A. D. 107, the writer, a certain Gaius Iulius Apollinaris, described his commander Claudius Severus as *hypatikos* (= *consularis*) and *hypatikos legeonos* (= *consularis legionis*).² The term *consularis* is the unofficial, popular form *legatus Augusti pro praetore* and was widely used as title for provincial governors. In this it did not matter whether the governor had already been consul or was only expecting nomination to that honor while still serving in a praetorian province, such as Arabia, with only one legion at his command.³ Claudius Severus, we learn from this letter, was already in A. D. 107 governor of Arabia, a position he was known, from a number of other documents, to have held until as late as A. D. 115.⁴ At the same time he was, according to Roman administrative prac-

tice, commander of the garrison of his province, i. e., the legion in which Iulius Apollinaris served. Which legion was this?

Since Apollinaris' home is Karanis in Egypt and since his letters testify to a lively and regular communication between there and Arabia, the legion in which he served may have come from Egypt. It had participated perhaps in a pincer-movement from the north and the south that accomplished the seemingly bloodless conquest of the Nabataean kingdom.⁵ Of the two Egyptian legions, *XXII Deiotariana* and *III Cyrenaica*, the latter is known to have participated in Trajan's Parthian War,⁶ most probably because it was stationed in Arabia and thus much closer to the theater of operations. On the strength of this argument and from the fact that *legio III Cyrenaica* later in the second century became the permanent garrison of Arabia Mrs. Préaux had concluded that Gaius Iulius Apollinaris' unit was the *III Cyrenaica*, stationed in Arabia from the beginning. To be sure, at the end of the Parthian War the legion had to return temporarily to Egypt to help

(1) C. Préaux, *Une Source nouvelle sur l'annexion de l'Arabie par Trajan: les papyrus de Michigan 465 et 466*. *Phoibos* 5 (1950-51) 123-139.

(2) PMich 466.

(3) See e. g., A. Stein, *Die Reichsbeamten von Dazien* (Budapest, 1944) 54. For the occurrence of this shortened title at the time under

discussion see M. Speidel, *The Captor of Decebalus*, *JRS*, 60 (1970) 152.

(4) *PIR* II, 2nd ed., Claudius 1023.

(5) Cornelius Palma, the governor of Syria had led the conquest, *Dio* 68, 14, 5. See R. Hanslik, 'Ulpianus' *RE Suppl.* X (1965) 1079ff.

(6) R. O. Fink, *Doura-Reports VI* (New Haven, 1936) 480-482.

quell the Jewish revolt, ⁷ but that was only for a limited time, and soon thereafter it returned to Arabia. ⁸

This view of things has recently been questioned. A fragmentary, undated inscription from Gerasa mentioning the *legio VI Ferrata* was adduced to suggest that this legion, not the *III Cyrenaica* formed the initial garrison of Arabia. ⁹ Yet since Hadrian spent the winter of A. D. 130 with his bodyguard, the *equites singulares Augusti* in Gerasa it is well possible that during this time men from the *VI Ferrata* stationed in nearby Judaea, were with him. ¹⁰ Alternatively, a detachment of this legion could have come to protect Gerasa during the revolt of Bar Kochba in A. D. 132 - 135. However that may be, it is difficult to see in the adduced

inscription a reliable clue to the original garrison of the province.

Had the *VI Ferrata* been the legion under the command of Claudius Severus in A. D. 170, Gaius Iulius Apollinaris would have been a member of it. However, in a recently published papyrus from Karanis, ¹¹ Apollinaris' unit is mentioned as *legio III Cyrenaica*. True, this papyrus is twelve years younger than the letter of A. D. 107, but since already Sabinus' father belonged to the same unit, ¹² the assumption is warranted that the son continued a family tradition, rather than change units. It seems therefore very likely that *legio II Cyrenaica* indeed formed, together with some *auxilia* ¹³ Arabia's first garrison.

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(7) It is known there until A. D. 119 (BGU 140, discussed by Préaux l. c. 129).

(8) E. Ritterling, 'legio' RE 12 (1924) 1509f: not later than A. D. 127.

(9) G. Bowersock, *The Annexation and Initial Garrison of Arabia*, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 5 (1970) 37-47, following A. H. M. Jones, JRS 18 (1928) 147.

(10) Cf. C. B. Welles in: Kraeling, *Gerasa* (1938) 391 and 435. The *VI Ferrata* was already stationed in Judaea by that time, see B. Lishitz, *Latomus* 1960, 109-111. Maybe as early as A. D. 123, cf. H. G. Pflaum *IEJ* 19 (1969) 225-233.

(11) PMich 562. E. Husselmann, *Papyri*

from Karanis (Cleveland, Ohio, 1971) 101ff.

(12) PMich 571.

(13) Some of the *auxilia* of the new province probably came from Egypt, too, such as the cohorts I *Hispanorum* and I *Thebaeorum*, cf. H. G. Pflaum, *Un nouveau diplôme militaire*, *Syria* 44 (1967) 339-362, esp. p. 356. In the papyrus P. Catt. II = M. Chr. 372, col. III, 12 (A. D. 114) a soldier of the cohort I *Thebaeorum* is said to have served under 'Severus'. This Severus may not have been the prefect of the cohort, but the Governor of Arabia who gave this soldier his discharge.